

**8 October 2020**

## **‘Care for People’ Group during lockdown**

**Item number: 5.6**

### **Executive summary**

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This covering report introduces the attached report on the actions taken by the Council’s ‘Care for People’ Group during lockdown. Given the nature of the pandemic emergency, the high level of public interest and the extensive range of interventions undertaken, it is important that board members are fully briefed, particularly given the possibility of a second wave of COVID.

#### **Board members are asked to:**

Note the accompanying report outlining the activities and services coordinated by the ‘Care for People’ Group during lockdown.

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## Report title

### 1 Purpose

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- 1.1 This covering report introduces the attached report on the actions taken by the Council's 'Care for People' Group during lockdown. Given the nature of the pandemic emergency, the high level of public interest and the extensive range of interventions undertaken, it is important that board members are fully briefed, particularly given the possibility of a second wave of COVID.

### 2 Recommendations

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- 2.1 As a result of this report what are Members being asked to:-

Note the accompanying report outlining the activities and services coordinated by the 'Care for People' Group during lockdown.

### 3 Background and main report

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- 3.1 The Care for People Group was established in 2012 in response to legislation and guidance relating to civil emergencies. Its remit is to undertake a coordinating role across agencies and communities in the provision of humanitarian assistance during emergencies. In addition to responding to emergencies such as severe weather or power cuts, the Group has also provided a vehicle for coordinating activities in dealing with social issues of a more ongoing nature such as the settlement of Syrian refugees.
- 3.2 The organisational arrangements and main activities undertaken are outlined in the attached report. The report also considers the lessons learned and makes recommendations for improvement in responding to similar situations including a second wave of COVID 19.
- 3.3 While it is the Council's role is to ensure that the humanitarian response to civil emergencies is well coordinated, the report acknowledges that a wide range of organisations and services - public, voluntary and private - played vital roles in providing support during lockdown. Community Councils had a particularly significant role in enabling support systems to be effective in their local communities.

## 4 Policy Implications

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- 4.1 The primary focus of the 'Care for People' activities was to support people to stay well during lockdown in terms of their physical and mental health, including those people at risk of health inequalities. In addition, it was recognised that some people would be under increased financial pressure e.g. people unable to work and yet not eligible for furlough. The availability of financial assistance, or support in kind, and financial advice made a short- term contribution to reducing the gap in financial circumstances.

The Care for People activities were intended to prevent, as far as possible, the unintended adverse consequences of lockdown on people's health and wellbeing. The approach to providing these supports included the paramount necessity of exacerbating the spread of the virus. The use of technology; safety guidelines; and the provision of personal protection equipment where possible; were some of the main steps taken to prevent the spread of the virus in the process of providing support.

The interventions outlined in the accompanying report were put in place to reduce the potential adverse consequences of lockdown. They were not intended to improve performance but rather to help to limit potential deterioration in relation to health inequalities and the physical and mental wellbeing of the people of Midlothian.

## 5 Directions

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- 5.1 This report has no impact on any directions.

## 6 Equalities Implications

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- 6.1 As is noted in the full report, an Integrated Impact Assessment was undertaken on behalf of the Care for People Group early on during lockdown. It identified the potential risks of some people being at a disadvantage in being able to access the supports provided through Care for People activities. These included the ability to access on-line services/resources such as basic shopping. Another example of risk was the possibility that some people might be unable to access support during lockdown due for instance, to domestic violence. The Care for People Group developed actions to seek to mitigate any identified risk of inequity.

## 7 Resource Implications

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- 7.1 This report does not make recommendations which entail the allocation of resources. It outlines actions and services which have already been provided. The redeployment of Council staff to respond to the humanitarian needs of the population was on a significant scale. However, this report does not attempt to quantify the costs associated with this response. Nor does it consider the extent to which the allocation of the Government's COVID 19 funding package to the Council

will cover any additional costs incurred as a result of the 'Care for People' activities arising from the pandemic.

## 8 Risk

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- 8.1 The Local Authority has clear duties in responding to civil emergencies as laid out in The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 and subsequent guidance on resilience under the banner *Preparing Scotland*. This guidance includes detailed advice about how to "Care for People Affected by Emergencies". <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/284989/0086538.pdf>

The failure to provide a robust humanitarian response would have incurred a significant risk that vulnerable people, including people who were shielding and older people, would have been unable to access basic essentials, particularly food and medicine. This in turn would have led to a reputational risk to the Council.

The activities undertaken by the Care for People Group were intended to manage these risks. Nevertheless, in the event of a second wave or future pandemic it is important to take stock and to seek to identify measures which would improve the humanitarian response. The preparation of the accompanying report is intended to facilitate an exercise of reflection on what worked and what could have been done better.

## 9 Involving people

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- 9.1 The membership and approach of the Care for People Group reflects the emphasis placed on seeking to work very closely with localities including with Community Councils and Community Development Trusts. One of the lessons learned from the pandemic is that stronger links ought to be developed with these local organisations well in advance of future civil emergencies.

## 10 Background Papers

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<b>AUTHOR'S NAME</b>	Alison White
<b>DESIGNATION</b>	Chief Social Work Officer
<b>CONTACT INFO</b>	Alison.white@midlothian.gov.uk
<b>DATE</b>	01/10/2020

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**Appendices:** Midlothian's Care for People Report on the Response to Lockdown